

YUGOSLAVIA:

Serb Rebellion in Croatia Spreads

Growing Serb-provoked violence may lead to a strong military response, with or without Belgrade's approval. [REDACTED]

The Army yesterday sought federal Presidency approval to oust Croatian forces from the republic's Serb enclave. The Presidency demurred but ordered the troops to withdraw. Croatia refused—although it replaced some paramilitary forces with police—and the Presidency will meet today with all republic presidents. One member says the Presidency will threaten some form of martial law if republic leaders cannot compromise, [REDACTED]

Gunfights between Croatian police and Serbs in eastern Croatia yesterday wounded at least six officers, and Croatian authorities are threatening a crackdown. Leaders in the Serb enclave have promised to arm the populace and claim Serbian President Milosevic has pledged to supply weapons. Local radicals late yesterday attacked a Croatian paramilitary unit, catching federal Army vehicles in the crossfire. [REDACTED]

The Milosevic-controlled Serbian legislature called the Serb rebellion in Croatia justified, offered "support," and called on the Army to take over eastern Croatia. The legislature repeated Serbia's demand to keep all ethnic Serbs in one state but deflected the enclave's announced accession to the Serbian Republic. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Common ground for any agreement to end the violence is eroding fast. Croatian officials clearly feel they must maintain order within their republic's borders and probably believe backing down now would effectively cede control over the Serb enclave. Radicals in the enclave almost certainly fear reprisals for Croatian casualties and probably will not give up without strong Serbian pressure. [REDACTED]

Milosevic probably believes failing to support Serbs in Croatia would give the opposition the political tool it needs to oust him. He appears reluctant, however, to take the blame for a rupture of Yugoslavia by accepting the Croatian-Serbs' accession to Serbia. [REDACTED]

Military leaders, who have said repeatedly they will not allow ethnic civil war, probably will press the Presidency again today for authorization to disarm the combatants. Increased violence directly affecting military personnel may persuade the generals to act unilaterally. [REDACTED]